

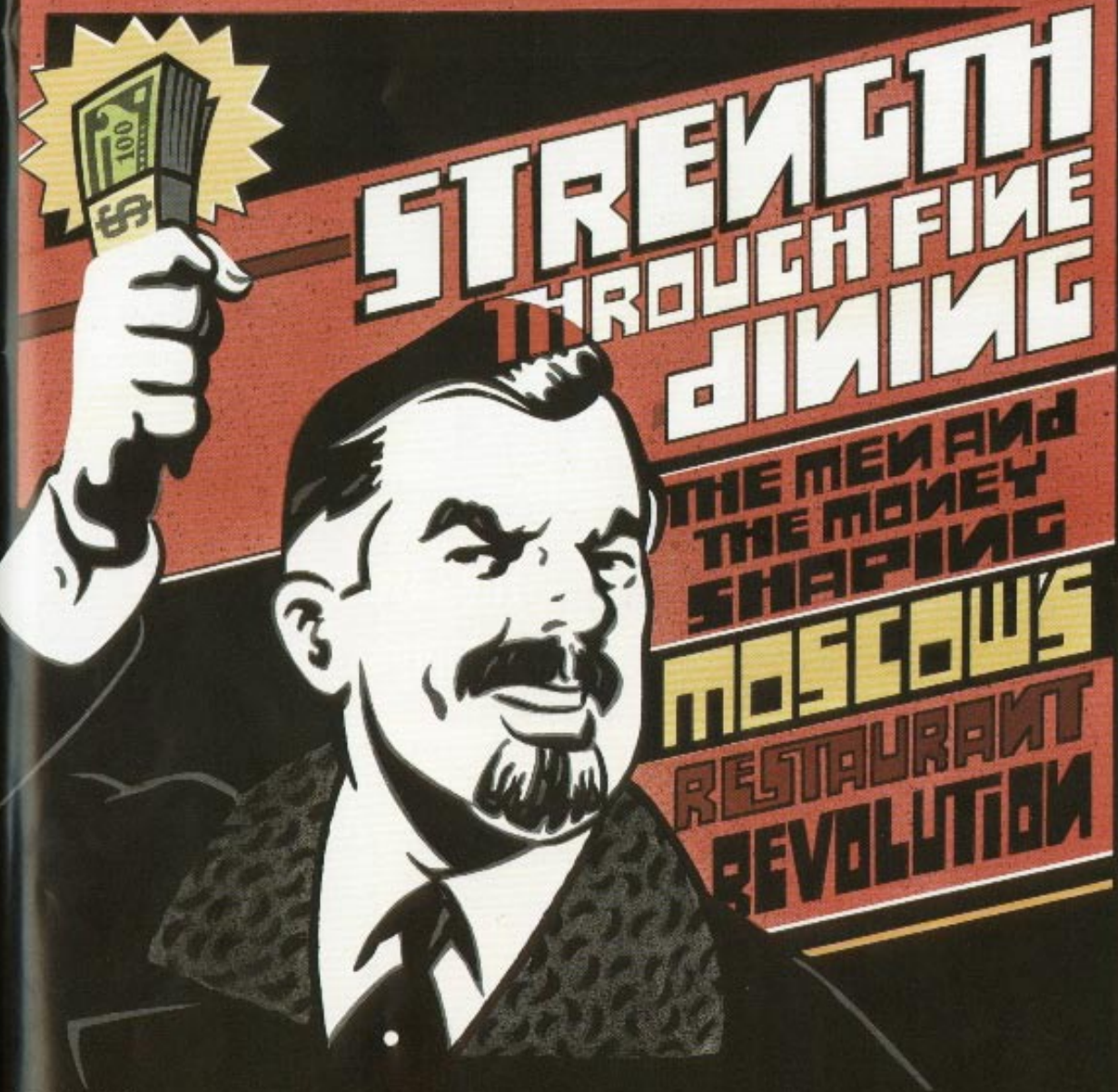
JOIN THE WORKERS - YOUR CAREER REVOLUTION STARTS ON PAGE 61

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MOSCOW UPRISING

★ If planning really is everything, and I went to Moscow in mid-December at less than a week's notice with no translator, it must be a minor miracle that my two-and-a-half-day trip to the Russian capital came to anything at all.

As it was, I got the chance to speak to three of the most important restaurateurs in the city and had a peek at what is probably, at seven years and \$50million in the making, the most expensive restaurant ever built.

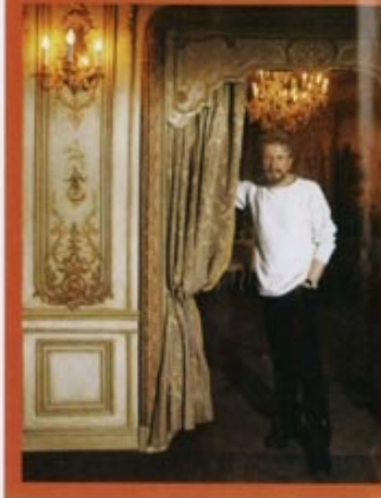
While I learnt that the Moscow rush-hour traffic is ferocious, and that you need a special permit to use a tripod on a camera, that Russians' portions make Americans look like modest eaters, that the tendency for door staff to aggressively insist on taking your coat before you enter a restaurant harks back to the bad old days of the heat-packing Russian mafia, and that it's really best not to worry what's in the flask your Armenian taxi driving is swilling as he pulls a doughnut in the snow, I still don't have a watertight answer for why Russians are so in love with sushi.

What I can tell you about Moscow, when it comes to restaurants, is that it's a city that's going places very quickly. Although its restaurants have yet to scale true gastronomic heights, they're surprisingly progressive when it comes to opening hours; while we've only recently got all-day dining, a large number of reputable restaurants in Moscow are not only open all day, but 24 hours a day. I don't expect that will happen here anytime soon.

WITH ITS NEW FINANCIAL CLOUT, MOSCOW HAS DISCOVERED AN APPETITE FOR RESTAURANTS. NOW IT'S TURNING TO BRITAIN FOR THE TALENT AND EXPERIENCE TO FAN THE FLAMES OF THIS 21ST CENTURY GASTRONOMIC REVOLUTION

WORDS: JOE WARWICK
PHOTOGRAPHY: LAURIE FLETCHER

'THEN ALL THESE PEOPLE DISAPPEARED. IT WAS LIKE CHICAGO IN THE '30S. THEY ALL KILLED EACH OTHER, AND THE REST WAS DIVIDED BETWEEN JUST TWO GUYS'



ANDREI DELLOS
A SHOWMAN ON
THE MOSCOW SCENE

★ There's probably something being lost in translation when Andrei Dellos describes himself as a 'maniac', but then he is a man who's just spent \$50 million on his latest restaurant, Turandot, a mock Venetian palace named after a Puccini opera with a Chinese-Japanese menu devised by Alan Yau of Hakkasan.

Although Turandot is grandiose even by Dellos' standards, he's always been a restaurateur with grand ambitions. Take Café Pushkin, that sits on Tverskoi Bulvar next door to Turandot, which Dellos built from scratch in just six months to resemble the home of a 19th Century Russian aristocrat and which opened in 1999, just in time to make the great Russian poet's bicentenary. It's become the biggest draw for tourists to Moscow after the Kremlin and Red Square, and serves an upmarket take on traditional Russian food, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Then there's Shinok, a recreation of a Ukrainian farmhouse, complete with live farm animals, including a horse that's exercised in the street twice a day by means of a purpose-built lift.

In 1990 Dellos was settled in Paris, where he'd been living as a painter and art restorer since 1984, when he returned to his hometown for a visit that was only supposed to last a few days. But he had his pocket picked. "I lost all my identification papers and had to stay here for three months before they could be restored," he explains. "I was back in Russia and it wasn't Russia anymore. I couldn't paint because I didn't have a workshop, and there were no clubs and no real restaurants in Moscow, so I decided to open a small club just for friends. I didn't know Russia so I didn't put questions to myself, I just opened it and later learned that I'd just opened the first

private club in Russia. It was unbelievably successful, with queues of 200 people waiting outside in the middle of a Moscow winter."

But not everything was so easy. "Twenty times a day I received threats and promises, and from very serious people. Soviet people were peaceful, educated and nice looking and then suddenly, from the depths of the earth came these mafia demons. I didn't sleep because I was so afraid. I thought to myself, 'you have to make a choice, and if you are afraid, return to Paris. But if you want to make something here just stop being afraid', and after a month of 'negotiations' with these people I developed a very thick skin.

"Then all these people disappeared. It was like Chicago in the '30s. They all killed each other, and the rest was divided between just two guys. The first was killed by the police and the other is now a big, noble businessman. The period passed and now there is no mafia at all. I can guarantee it."

Dellos' other standalone restaurants are Le Duc, which serves French food in a dining room styled like a gothic cathedral, Bochka, which offers simple, home-cooked Russian food, and he also runs the restaurant at The Central House of Writers (see p74). Underpinning these is a 16-strong and rising chain of inexpensive, rustic-themed canteens called Mu-Mu, apparently named after the sound a Russian cow makes.

With the first stage of Turandot up and running, an Italian food-serving palazzo will open inside the building towards the end of 2006 with a Russian palace to come. When completed, Turandot will seat over 500 and employ 600.

"The problem of modern production, service, everything, is the scale. Renaissance artists worked on a scale of one millimetre, today we work on a scale of one kilometre. Today everything is approximate, art, architecture, everything. We don't have time to work on a small scale any more, to work on detail," says Dellos as he looks around Turandot. "This is baroque, this is maximalism."



Top Left:
Andrei Dellos

Top Above and
Opposite page:
Turandot,
complete with
monkey's made
by the set
designers from
the Bolshoi
Ballet

Above, Middle:
Café Pushkin

Directly Above,
and Right:
Shinok, with its
live tree and
animal show





Yauatski

 Alan Yau first visited Moscow in 1983. "I went over on a short holiday and I remember the place as being appallingly oppressive," he recalls. "It was still the Soviet era and absolutely nothing was available and I remember everything feeling so claustrophobic, constrictive and restrictive."

He did not return until nearly two decades later in 2002, this time to work as a consultant on Shatush, a restaurant that he found bore more than a passing resemblance to his own Hakkasan.

"When I returned to Moscow I was struck by how much it had changed, it almost reminded me of China, in the sense that, post-communism, the whole place has been opened up and, compared to '83, there was a real commercialisation of the city," he says. "For someone based in Europe, today Moscow feels like a more refreshing

place, somewhere full of opportunity where once there was none."

Yau agreed to work on the menu, setting up and staffing the kitchen for Turandot 18 months ago, and has spent an average of four working days each month in Moscow since.

"The biggest challenge has been to re-engineer the menu to fit with the concept and design of the building, which really was created under the auspices of Chinoiserie," he says. "Defining Chinoiserie from an interior point of view is very easy, but to make it compatible with the menu has been very tough, because nothing clearly defines Chinoiserie from a cuisine point of view. In terms of food, Chinoiserie is about looking at the impact the first generation of Chinese immigrants to Europe had on Imperial Chinese cooking. I think of perfect examples of Chinoiserie as being crispy Peking Duck and XO chicken."

A MUSCOVITE IN NEW WORK

The revolution has not been televised - it's being served up all over the capital

★ The Russians have well and truly come to London, are growing in numbers and wealth, and are increasingly running and investing in restaurants. So, what effect is this having on the industry? Who is behind it? And why the obsession with upmarket Japanese food?

According to London-based, Russian-born business consultant Theo Vassilyeff, "The Russians genuinely love England, it reminds them of pre-revolution Russia in some ways."

Many have made London their home through affection for the country, respect for public schooling, banking and legal systems, and love for its cosmopolitan character.

Janina Wolkow, the 29-year-old owner of Sumosan in Albermarle Street, Mayfair, came to the capital to finish her studies. "It simply felt like a city I wanted to live in." The family had first moved here in the '70s, branched into restaurants, and now have three outlets in Moscow and projects being looked at in Kiev and Berlin.

"London has a great infrastructure in terms of getting first-class produce," she says. It is a regular feature of the family's Moscow operations to fly fresh produce in twice a week. With freshness at a premium with the sushi and sashimi-inspired menu of her restaurants, you can see the appeal. "Many Moscow restaurants use frozen stuff," she says dismissively.

But why the vogue for upmarket Japanese-themed restaurants among Russian operators? "Once, Japanese food was served in very few outlets [in Russia], it was very exclusive," Janina explains. "Now it has opened up. It's flavoursome and healthy. That's why people are turning to it."

Vassilyeff, however, thinks that Japanese-influenced dining has a further resonance for Russians. "Very fresh produce can be very scarce there and hence it achieves a certain status," he says. The result is that Japanese food has come to be seen as the high-end cuisine to many Russians. Add to this the nation's love of caviar, and the rise of the Nobu franchise, coinciding with the arrival of Russian wealth in London and New York, and one can begin to see the logic.

Moscow-based Vesta-Centre International Group has just set up Yakitoria in London's Paddington Basin, and Russian-born director Dmitry Bureychenko shares his compatriots' love of London. "Every city has its time at the top," he says, "and now it is London's." But their start-up costs were high. And Moscow, for all one bears about a strangling bureaucracy, is a place where things get done far more quickly by comparison, he reckons. "It's a fast-growing market over there and things happen at a pace which mirrors that - much quicker than here."

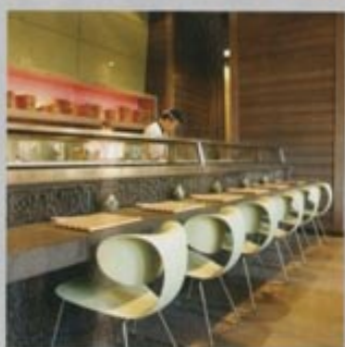
For Lubov Shurmer, who, with her daughter, owns Knightsbridge-based Viktor, it was a family passion for the food and culture of Japan that led her into serving high-end, Oriental cuisine, and this has combined with the frisson of living and working in a great city. "London is competitive," she says, "in finance, restaurants, everything. And we Russians love competition."

'LONDON HAS A GREAT INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GETTING FIRST-CLASS PRODUCE'

But there's little argument that perceptions of Russian business can be less than positive. That the finance behind many Russian-owned restaurants is variously described as coming from 'import-export', 'mining' or 'investments' may not help. Are the Russians the Arthur Daleys of dining?

Vassilyeff says, "You have to remember that Capitalism was banned in Russia for most of the last century." The quiet, understated English can take Russians' ready enthusiasm for this new system of trade the wrong way. But equally, some Russians, Vassilyeff observes, could do with learning a little bit more about the host nation. "Some of them don't always realise that in England, sure, money can buy you a great deal - but it can't buy you everything."

David Lancaster



FROM RUSSIA WITH LUCRE it may not be so foolish to go Russian into a partnership

• According to owner of Sumosan, Janina Wolkow, "Currently there are a lot of Russians who are looking to invest in projects in London." Business consultant Theo Vassilyeff advises that they will mostly go with what they know: restaurants that are upmarket, cosmopolitan and that have a large dose of

glamour. "Gastropubs are not a concept they understand," he says. "Russia is largely either upmarket or basic - cafés or grand, stunning-looking restaurants. They do both very well but they are not good at generating a middle-class or a middle-ranking eatery."

Lubov Shurmer, owner of

Viktor, points out, "We are risk takers. But we are well travelled and smart."

She also adds with pride, "Remember, Russian education is, and was, quite fantastic."

A proven ability to get what seems the impossible done under difficult circumstances will be looked for in any

partner. After all, that's often what they have achieved at home.

So with Russians, don't - ever - assume that you'll be dealing with a bear of a nation with peasant tastes and a Trabant collection. This is a major nuclear power that beat America into space, has maintained the world's

leading ballet company and is steeped in a brilliant (if rather gloomy) literary tradition. And in restaurants, as in more things than either side cares to admit, the Russians are rather like the Americans: they'll think big, be willing to invest - but they'll expect a very decent return on their money. DL



Opposite page, top to bottom: Viktor, Yakitoria and Sumosan

Left: The Moskva River at night
Below left: A rarely-sighted Muscovite taxi
Below right: Old habits die hard near the Kremlin



ARKADY NOVIKOV
THE MR. BIG OF MOSCOW'S RESTAURANTS

In 1990 Arkady Novikov was turned down for a job at Moscow's first McDonald's, but as he's since become, the biggest restaurateur in the city, it's safe to assume that he's not bitter. He took rejection from Ronald on the chin and with the fortuitous combination of a degree in economics and a cheffing qualification from a Moscow culinary school, he opened his first restaurant in 1992. He did so with a loan of \$50,000 from a friend. It was called Sirena, had an aquarium set in the floor, and served fish.

Today he employs around 10,000 people, and is involved in close to 100 different restaurants in and around Moscow, with various private and commercial partners, for example Vogue Café being run in partnership with Condé Nast.

Despite the restaurants that he is famous for being aimed at Moscow's moneyed elite, his growing Yolki Palki chain of casual bistros with all-you-can-eat buffets are for the middle market.

Most recently he's diversified into luxury food

courts, his take on something like Harvey Nichols' Food Hall or Dean & DeLuca in New York.

"The restaurant business in Moscow is very good," says Novikov, "but we have one problem, and that problem is with real estate, as there are very few good locations. Firstly, traditional Soviet architecture doesn't really work for restaurants, and in Moscow there are only two or three pedestrianised streets."

He describes what he does as "modern restaurants with different concepts", whether that concept is Italian, French Japanese or Russian. His restaurants are, he says, "an international product". Accordingly, he imports talent where necessary, whether it's French pastry chefs or Japanese designers.

He has different business partners to help with securing locations, and also because "restaurants need owners, and the owners need to be looking at things all the time, and with this many restaurants one person can't look at everything".

For the same reason he's unwilling to expand his Russian operations beyond Moscow, although he is considering a project in London, possibly a branch of the Vogue Café concept. At this stage of the proceedings, though, nothing has been signed.



Far left: Stepan Mikhalkov
Left: Vertinsky
Below left: Vanil
Bottom: Guillaume Rochette

RESTAURATEUR STEPAN MIKHALKOV ON THE UNSTOPPABLE ADVANCE OF THE RUSSIAN PALATE

As the son of an Oscar-winning film director and a famous Russian actress, Stepan Mikhalkov had the sort of privileged childhood that meant he always ate better than the average Soviet era Russian child, often getting to eat at the café of the Union of Filmmakers, Writers and Directors with his parents. He opened his first restaurant in 2001 and currently has four - Vertinsky, Vanil, Casual and Veterok. He plans to add two more, a yet unnamed Italian and an Indian called Indus which will open this Spring, and on which the London-based chef Vineet Bhatia.

"During 70 years of Soviet rule, all the restaurants were serving one menu, cold meat, cold fish and the choice of a couple of main courses," explains Mikhalkov. "I was lucky enough to get to eat in the private clubs that my parents had access to, and the atmosphere of

those places stayed with me. And so, for that reason, I always wanted to open a restaurant."

Mikhalkov believes that although the Moscow restaurant scene is developing apace, it still has a long way to go. "The market is developing, but not so quickly that the public are ready for gastronomy like they have in London, Paris and New York - places with big plates and small tasting portions," he says. "Russians still think that if the plate is big there should be a lot of food on it, and most people still want vodka rather than wine and are happy with a big steak."

He believes Moscow's restaurants to be leagues ahead of everywhere else in Russia. "Moscow is like a different country to the rest of Russia," he says. "Even if you go to St Petersburg, you'll find nice designs, nice locations and a nice atmosphere, but the food will be terrible."

With the help of his mother's recipes he's on a mission to try and revive traditional Russian cooking through a special menu at Vertinsky, a concept he's hoping to bring to London, possibly in Harrods, some time in the next year. "Real Russian food doesn't really exist. If you go to the

restaurants that say they serve Russian food, it will be Soviet food but rearranged," he explains. "The real Russian recipes died during the 70 years of Soviet rule because nobody kept a record of them, and not only that, but at the end of the 19th Century, Russian food was halfway towards French but was made with Russian ingredients. The only place where original Russian cuisine still existed was in the family, because the knowledge had been passed down from generation to generation."



WANT TO WORK IN MOSCOW? Eureka can get you there

Guillaume Rochette, through his London-based agency Eureka Executive Search, has been recruiting for the top end of the Moscow restaurant and retail market since 2001. He is behind setting up both Alan Yau's, and Vineet Bhatia's Russian consultancies, and has recruited chefs for Dellos, Novikov and Mikhalkov amongst others, and has placed around 50 European

chefs in Moscow in the last four years.

"They are having a food revolution over there like we had in the UK in the '90s," he says. "But the Russians are trying to move much, much faster than that. I expect the market in Moscow to at least double in the next five years."

So far, Rochette has mostly been working to find chefs. "Our business now in Russia

is currently 95 per cent chefs and five per cent managers but the next challenge for us is to start delivering more management," he says. "Because in the future there is going to be some great jobs on the management front for qualified British candidates. Brits are very exportable in that they can relate to Europe, America, the Middle East and Asia, all you have to do is look at the

number of British working abroad in hotels."

And for British workers, the attractions are high, says Rochette. "At the top level for very high end chefs and management Moscow, is probably the best paid place to work overseas. If you have the talent, want to make a name for yourself quickly and make lots of money at the same, it's the place go." www.eurekaexecutive.com

